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Kawartha Works Community Co-op Upbeat About New Partnerships

by Diane Engelstad

It was like a community spring thaw: smiling neighbours, and local “movers and shakers,” setting aside their chainsaws and ice-storm clean-up for an evening, to attend the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Kawartha Works Community Co-op (KWCC).

It was the tenth anniversary after all, and there would be cake.

Jim Armstrong, founding member and Chair of KWCC, noted as he recounted the Co-op’s history that ten years was only the beginning. It was not lost on him that the Fenelon Falls Curling Club, where the meeting was held, was now 123 years old and still going strong.

There were many appreciative cheers throughout the evening and that prompted one of them.

KWCC was born in 2015 when a few visionaries in Fenelon Falls wondered if collaborative grassroots efforts could *“improve the social infrastructure in Kawartha Lakes by enabling the creation, development and management of not-for-profit initiatives with artistic, cultural, recreational, health, environmental, economic and social improvement aims.”*

They modelled Kawartha Works on the Haliburton County Community Cooperative, which already had a proven track record for turning worthy ideas into reality for the good of the community.

Since then, Kawartha Works has launched thirteen community-focussed initiatives, including The Grove Theatre, Bikeshare, and the annual Downtown Sculpture Exhibition, to name a few.



An enthusiastic crowd, which included Mayor Doug Elmslie, gathered to celebrate past accomplishments and new endeavours of the Kawartha Works Community Co-op.

The Annual Meeting, held on April 23, focussed on two new collaborative ventures — Youth Services in Fenelon Falls; and Vital Signs. They were described by collaborators and keynote

presenters Amy Terrill, Executive Director of BGC Kawarthas; and Laurie Dillon-Schalk, Executive Director of the Community Foundation of Kawartha Lakes.

BGC Kawarthas (formerly Boys and Girls Clubs of Kawartha Lakes) has been providing multi-faceted support for youth in the area since 1970. In early 2024, Amy Terrill explained, BGC and KWCC recognized their mutual concern for Fenelon Falls youth, and a partnership quickly



KWCC Board member Carol Milroy, and keynote speakers Laurie Dillon-Schalk (Executive Director, Kawartha Foundation), and Amy Terrill (Executive Director, BGC Kawarthas) enjoy 10th Anniversary refreshments.

developed to work together for long-term goals. The collaboration led to a drop-in program on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons for young people aged 12-18, that began this past February, ahead of schedule. As one teenager has put it, the drop-in is creating “a kind and special sense of community...where people from different friend groups come together.” But the youth services team, which includes youth participants, is clear that for the long term they envision an integrated youth wellness hub in a dedicated space, providing mental health and other well-being services along

with the engaging activities that young people need. BGC Kawarthas and KWCC are asking for the ongoing support of the community to make it all happen.

Laurie Dillon-Schalk explained that, like other community foundations, the Kawartha Foundation engages the community to fund local needs. And one of its five key objectives, Laurie noted, is to *better understand the community's need*. In a very recent consultation with more than twenty-five non-profit groups in the City of Kawartha Lakes, it was evident that there is no clear picture of the health of the city, with many hidden voices that are not being heard.

Vital Signs is the brand name for a type of evidence-based research done by community foundations that measures community well-being and belonging. Research data, quantitative and qualitative, are aligned to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Kawartha Works is partnering on the project with particular emphasis on community engagement, as well as data analysis. The multi-year project will help direct charitable contributions and investments where they can be of the greatest benefit in the spirit of those SDGs. Both non-profit community organizations and government services will depend on such key information and guidance as they relate to current issues and anticipated growth in this region. *Vital Signs* has the critical support of the City of Kawartha Lakes and municipal staff.

Both speakers received enthusiastic applause for their presentations about these new endeavours. The meeting was also an opportunity for Councillor Mike Perry to acknowledge, on behalf of the City, the contributions of three dedicated members of the community: Jim Armstrong, Mike Barkwell, and Lynne Manning, who have been involved in multiple projects.

After such a challenging winter for so many, the KWCC Annual Meeting was clearly a welcome occasion to greet springtime and look with hope to the future with friends and neighbours.

Click [here](#) for a photo collage of the event. You can find a link to the 2024 [Annual Report here](#). Everyone is welcome to join the Co-op, with a nominal donation of \$10 annually. To sign up, click on [“Become a Member.”](#)



KWCC Chair and founding member, Jim Armstrong (centre), is applauded for his leadership in the community.